October 6, 2016

Honorable Chairwoman and Distinguished Committee Members:

We are all here because we wish to educate New Jersey students with competence and dedication and to confer on them degrees of lasting value.  The Rutgers full-time faculty – whom I represent – share this goal with the adjunct faculty.  Together, these two groups of instructors mount hundreds of undergraduate curricula in Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick.  Indeed, we share this responsibility at level approaching parity.  Once hired only here and there, adjunct faculty now teach 30% of Rutgers courses.  They do not, however, command 30% of the Rutgers budget or even that fraction of the 18% of Rutgers’ budget which is devoted to instruction.  Adjunct faculty earn an aggregate salary equivalent to 0.6% of the Rutgers budget.  For the administration, adjuncts have been a great bargain.

For our students, on the other hand, the mismanagement of adjunct teaching has eroded the quality of teaching and the value of degrees.  Let me explain.  Our administration pays adjuncts a piece-rate on the basis of the number of credits they teach.  As I have said, the rate is low; just as important, the rate offers no compensation for the many non-credit components of teaching.  Adjuncts advise and mentor students, supervise internships, and senior theses, and write letters of recommendation.  To the extent that adjuncts do these jobs, they volunteer for Rutgers and for their students.  Very often, however, these so-called part-time instructors actually must work multiple jobs at multiple campuses and, by necessity, confine their responsibilities to classroom teaching only.  And then they leave: Rutgers offers no job security whatsoever to its adjunct labor force.  Even fantastic, well-regarded teachers leave us for other adjunct positions with better conditions.  As result, many seniors applying to say, medical school, simply cannot find someone to recommend them.  Rutgers students compete less well than they could because Rutgers University cuts its teaching staff off at the knees.

Legislators, you are here to address this situation.  The shape of the Rutgers faculty has changed dramatically over the past three decades – in ways that undercut the quality of education.  All teachers want to teach their students, as whole people and over years.  Current arrangements allow adjuncts only to teach classes – only to teach credits, in fact, for one semester at a time.  We can fix this problem.  Wise reforms would integrate adjuncts more fully into the faculty, into the curriculum, and into the student life.  Adjunct working conditions are student learning conditions.  Let’s make them both better.

Respectfully,

David M. Hughes

Professor of Anthropology

President, Rutgers AAUP-AFT

Rutgers University